DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 286 170 CS 008 939

AUTHOR Kirkpatrick, Patricia; And Others
TITLE The Three R's in a Learning Support Center.
PUB DATE Oct 86
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the North Central Reading Association (29th, Notre Dame, IN, October 23-25, 1986).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Students; Educational Facilities; Enrollment; *High Risk Students; Individualized Instruction; *Learning Laboratories; Learning Motivation; Learning Problems; Learning Strategies; Metacognition; Reading Habits; Resource Centers; Student Attitudes; Study Habits; *Study Skills; Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS Taylor University IN

ABSTRACT

The Learning Support Center (LSC) at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana, has developed the Three R method--resources, retention, and renewal--of helping high risk students understand the material in their classes and remain in the university. The first method, resources, involves four types of resources--state-of-the-art equipment, qualified personnel, varied services, and stable university programs, and depends upon the large amount of equipment and staff available at the LSC, including a music listening center, a 27-terminal microcomputer lab, teacher education materials, directors, assistants, and numerous tutors. The LSC is also supported by faculty committees, the general education program, the Testing Office, and Student Development. The second method, retention, helps students who are failing remain in the university with specialized help. Twenty-five high risk students are given the same course schedule and are provided with an academic advisor. The students attend a study skills course and are tutored by upper-level students. The final method, renewal, helps students become more motivated and confident about their work by continual encouragement and support. Tutors and small-group instruction are employed, with the goal of giving at-risk students some sense of success and ability. It is hoped that the Three R method will help students be more successful in school, and become eager, self-directed learners. (Six figures consisting of flowcharts and lists are included.) (JC)

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The Three R's in a Learning Support Center

by

Patricia Kirkpatrick, Billie J. Manor, and Susan Winger
Learning Support Center
Taylor University
Upland, IN 46989

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

College educators today ask questions ranging from Why can't students be like they used to be? to Why did this student come to college? While some college professors occupy their time by debating and scrutinizing the philosophical whys of the present-day dilemma, learning center personnel puzzle the practical whys of Johnny's inability to write a paragraph, outline a chapter, or divide fractions.

Students like Johnny who have not responded to traditional teaching techniques challenge us because they

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bring a host of negative attitudes and insecurities into our centers. At the Learning Support Center (LSC) we employ three nontraditional R's--resources, retention and renewal philosophies--in addition to the foundational three R's (Fig. 1) to reach these students.

RESOURCES. To reach students who have not responded to traditional teaching techniques, we provide four types of resources: state-of-the-art equipment, qualified personnel, varied services, and stable university programs.

In the spring of 1986, the LSC moved from a crowded two-room center to a brand new facility, the south wing of the $5 1/2 million, 61,000 sq. ft. Zondervan Library (Fig. 2). With the new facility came added responsibilities and challenges; moreover, the character of the center changed. No longer was this LSC "our little niche" in the university. It transformed into a skills center plus when a music listening center, a 49-seat audiovisual classroom, a 27-terminal microcomputer lab, and shelves of teacher education materials came under the auspices of the LSC. Currently, the LSC contains $186,000 worth of equipment (see Fig. 3).

Although this equipment is a valuable resource, personnel ranks as our most precious asset (Fig. 4).

Operating as a department under the Academic Affairs Office, the LSC staff consists of

Director of LSC. Full-time position. Supervises the Center and teaches reading and study skills. Reports to the library director.

Technician. Full-time position. Assumes responsibility for the equipment.

Instructional Resource Coordinator. Part-time position to be filled. Will work part time in the LSC and part time in Information Services. In the LSC, he will promote computer literacy.

Coordinator of LSC Math Programs. Full-time position. Oversees the math program and two math tutors. Teaches mathematics and study skills.

LSC Assistant. Full-time secretarial position.

Director of Writing Lab. Part-time position. Supervises the Writing Lab and four tutors. Teaches writing classes. In addition, fifteen work-study students work 103 hours in various areas of the Center.

This staff provides the following services (Fig. 5) to the university:

Instructional Computing Services. Offers instruction in the use of computing tools and other information resources.

Collection Development Services. Houses teacher education

materials such as textbooks, filmstrips, records and software.

General Education Support Services. Provides alternate educational experiences in the required general education areas of speech, writing, computer literacy, and mathematics.

Preview Services. VCRs, slide projectors, filmstrip projectors, PCs, and cassette recorders available for previewing library materials.

Special Student Services. Notetaking and test-taking assistance for handicapped students.

Microcomputer Services. 27-terminal microcomputer lab for educational purposes.

Developmental Course Work Services. Offers study-skill, reading, and mathematics courses.

A-V Classroom Services. Classroom for supplemental instruction requiring VHS recorder, 3/4" Umatic player, video laser disk player, and high fidelity sound.

Developmental Tutorial Labs. Math and writing labs staffed by trained, upperclassmen tutors.

Ongoing support strengthens our program, and we are privileged to have our equipment, personnel, and services resources backed by four university structures: faculty committees, the general education program, the Testing Office, and Student Development. First, two faculty committees, Instructional Resources Committee and Skills

Proficiency Committee, direct policy making, give input on daily operations of the Center, and support financial needs. Figure 6 describes these committees' functions and composition as listed in the Taylor University Faculty Handbook. Second, the general education program, which requires students to demonstrate proficiency in writing, mathematics, computer literacy, and speech, monitors and motivates student progress. Third, the Testing Office scores learning styles, writing samples, and math proficiency testing. Special situations and retesting of students in a short period of time helps LSC personnel perform their jobs better. Finally, Student Development areas of career development and residence hall life assist the Center. Occasionally we call on Career Development to help students set realistic job goals and to identify specific job skills. This goal-setting and skill identification aids the student in seeing his work as relevant. Likewise, dorm directors provide extra attention by counseling or mapping out a plan of success for students.

RETENTION. The second R in our LSC is retention. In the good ol' days, the first semester freshman year served as a flunking out period for students who "didn't belong." Courses like English composition earned the

reputation of being a flunk-out course. Nevertheless, sagging enrollments and declining pool of college-age students in the late 70s and 80s altered this "flunk-out mentality" as colleges realized the need to renovate their philosophies about freshmen. Retention programs, enhanced by academic counselors, advising programs, and learning centers, blossomed. And the admissions counselor's job became more than one of getting students to college; keeping them on campus became top priority. Admissions offices today recruit graduates, not freshmen.

Like other universities, Taylor wants to retain its 1500 student body--especially those high-risk students to whom the LSC caters. To accomplish this task, we direct a retention assistance program, aid in academic probation, and provide peer tutoring.

Taylor's Retention Assistance Program (RAP), boasting a 70% success rate, groups 25 high-risk students together in the same course schedule and provides them with a special academic advisor. Each fall, RAP students are placed in one content area class such as US History, 100-level sociology, or freshman-level general education required course in order to guide and monitor their study habits and progress. Students also enroll in a study skills course, Applied Learning Techniques, in which they grasp material according to their learning style. An upperclassman hired to take

notes in the content area class and to hold study sessions with the RAP students provides additional accountability and individualized assistance.

Providing assistance in the area of academic probation is another way we attempt to retain students, and the LSC works closely with the assistant dean of academic affairs in this regard. The assistant dean of academic affairs and the LSC director not only correspond with students in academic trouble, but they also keep each other updated on current happenings through informal phone calls and memos. Furthermore, after the Records Office circulates a midterm list of students receiving Ds or Fs, the LSC director contacts each student by letter and urges him to come to the Center for assistance. This letter informs the student of LSC services and encourages students to consider tutoring.

Peer tutoring from trained upperclassmen, provided by the math lab and writing lab, is the third way we assist in the retention process. While many of the clients these labs attract come from core math or writing courses, several athletic study table and across the disciplines students seek help. In addition to tutoring, the Writing Lab offers six, half-hour evening workshops on writing topics per semester. Tutors also take condensed, ten-minute versions of these workshops into courses across the disciplines.

RENEWAL. Renewal of student motivation, renewal of student responsibility, and renewal of a confident self-image are top priorities as we teach the three R's.

In the LSC, we seek to help students achieve success in developmental reading, writing, and mathematics to make success more likely in other areas of college study. Individual, small group, and full-size class instruction using face-to-face as well as mediated learning techniques are employed. We attempt to assess the learning style of each student and adapt to it with a variety of approaches.

Many students come to the Center having had few previous successful learning experiences. Convinced that they simply cannot find 5% of $20, write a comparison/ contrast paper, or extract meaning a USA Today article, they bring with them blocks to learning built up over years of previous negative experiences in school. Our goal is to help them learn that they can overcome these difficulties, that strategies for learning when used will help them succeed. In succeeding, they gain confidence in themselves as adequate learners. The positive emotions generated by such experiences lead students to greet future learning experiences with a bit more enthusiasm.

Therefore, based on what we know about our clientele, we endorse two philosophies of renewal in the LSC:

1) To experience of success in learning. Learning,

whether individualized with a tutor or in small classes, provides students with opportunities for one-on-one encounters with instructors and peers and promotes communication as the learning proceeds unit by unit and the student masters the material. Small group settings make it possible for instructors to detect quickly any lack of understanding by individual learners and to spot positive expressions such as when a student understands a math or writing concept for the first time. An instructor cannot help but become involved in the exhilaration of a student's exclamation: "Now I understand!"

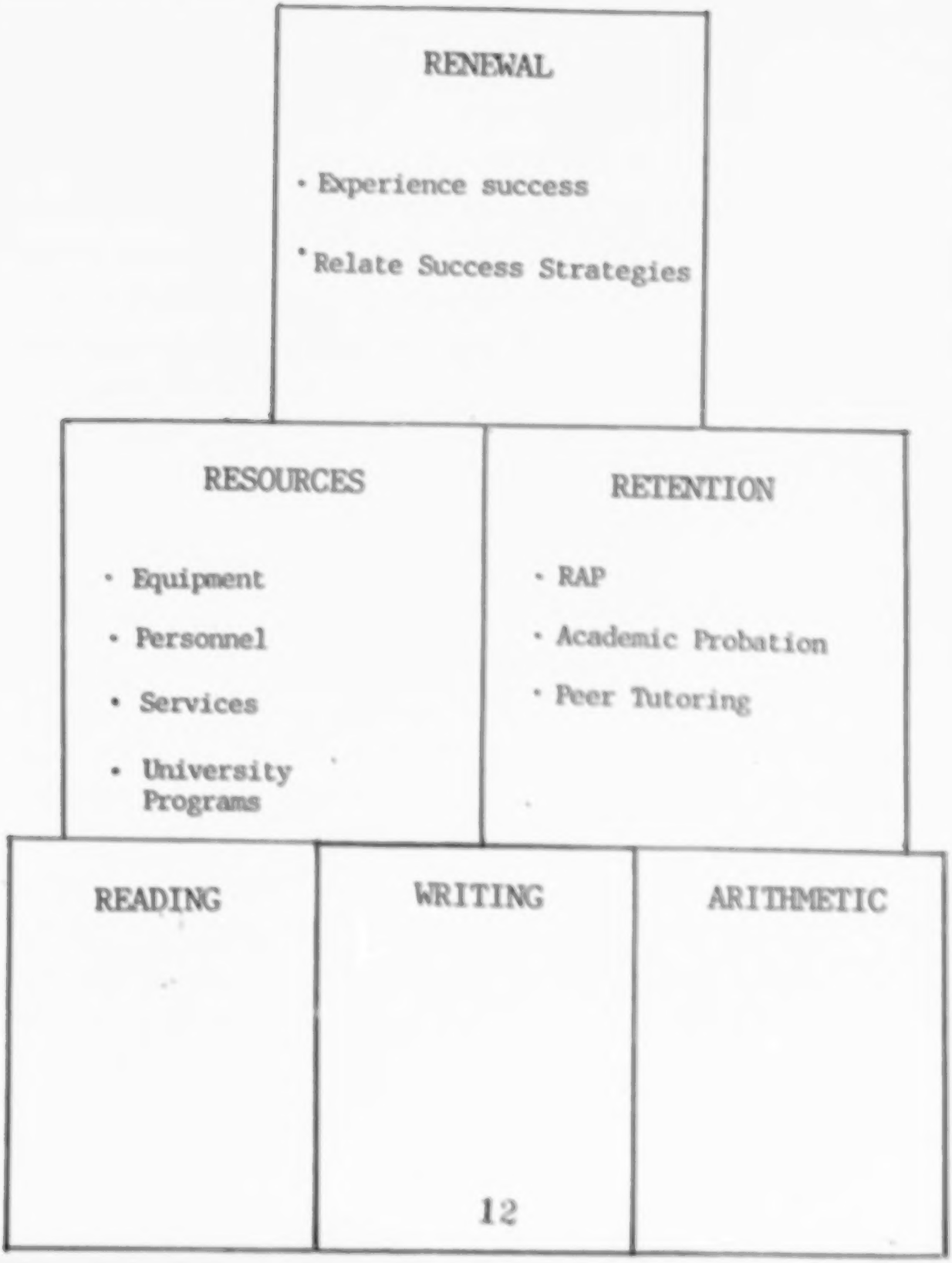
2) To relate success strategies to other courses.

Beyond the formal skills courses we teach in the Center, we offer support to students in their other courses of study. Sometimes our faculty or tutors will sit with students and help them outline a chapter or discover how to take an exam successfully. We keep in regular contact with athletic coaches and advisors about minority and international students to offer help to any students with special learning needs. In addition, we make presentations in various academic departments to discuss ways in which we can help students from those disciplines succeed more fully in their studies.

The LSC not only helps students learn certain academic

content and develop certain learning skills, but it also rekindles the glow of success that students feel when they set for themselves some new learning goals and go on to achieve them. We believe that a student can be renewed to the same eager, childlike creature he once was when he entered school and the world of learning opened to him. At Taylor, we've found that nontraditional R's like resources, retention and renewal philosophies firmly based on the traditional three R's do just that.

The Three R's in a Learning Support Center



Zondervan Library
Main Level

Figure 2

EQUIPMENT LIST FOR THE LEARNING SUPPORT CENTER

Computer Lab	18 Apple IIE 5 IBM 3 MacIntosh 2 VT 220 1 Laserwriter Printer
General Lab	4 Bell and Howell Ringmaster II 20 variable speed tape recorders 3 filmstrip viewers 3 video playback units (Panasonic) 16 study stations
Music Listening	20 listening stations, stereo
AV Classroom and Control Room	100" pull down screen Video projector (hook up with computer) High fidelity stereo sound, 2 Electo-Voice Sentry 505 speakers powered by Yamaha power amplifier (P2075C, 50 watts per channel) This system is capable of operating with 1 Programable CD player 2 Turntables 3 Cassette decks with Dolby and DBX 1 Pioneer video laser disk player that plays CAS and CLU formats 1 3/4" V-matic video player that plays NTSC, PAL, and SECAM formats 1 AM/FM stereo tuner 1 RCA colortrack 2000 monitor/receiver with 26" screen 1 RCA colortrack with 19" screen 2 Electro-/voice Sentry 100 speakers Portable cabinet housing 1 1/2" VHS with Dolby and in stereo 1 Programable CD player 1 Turntable 1 Cassette deck with Dolby and DBX

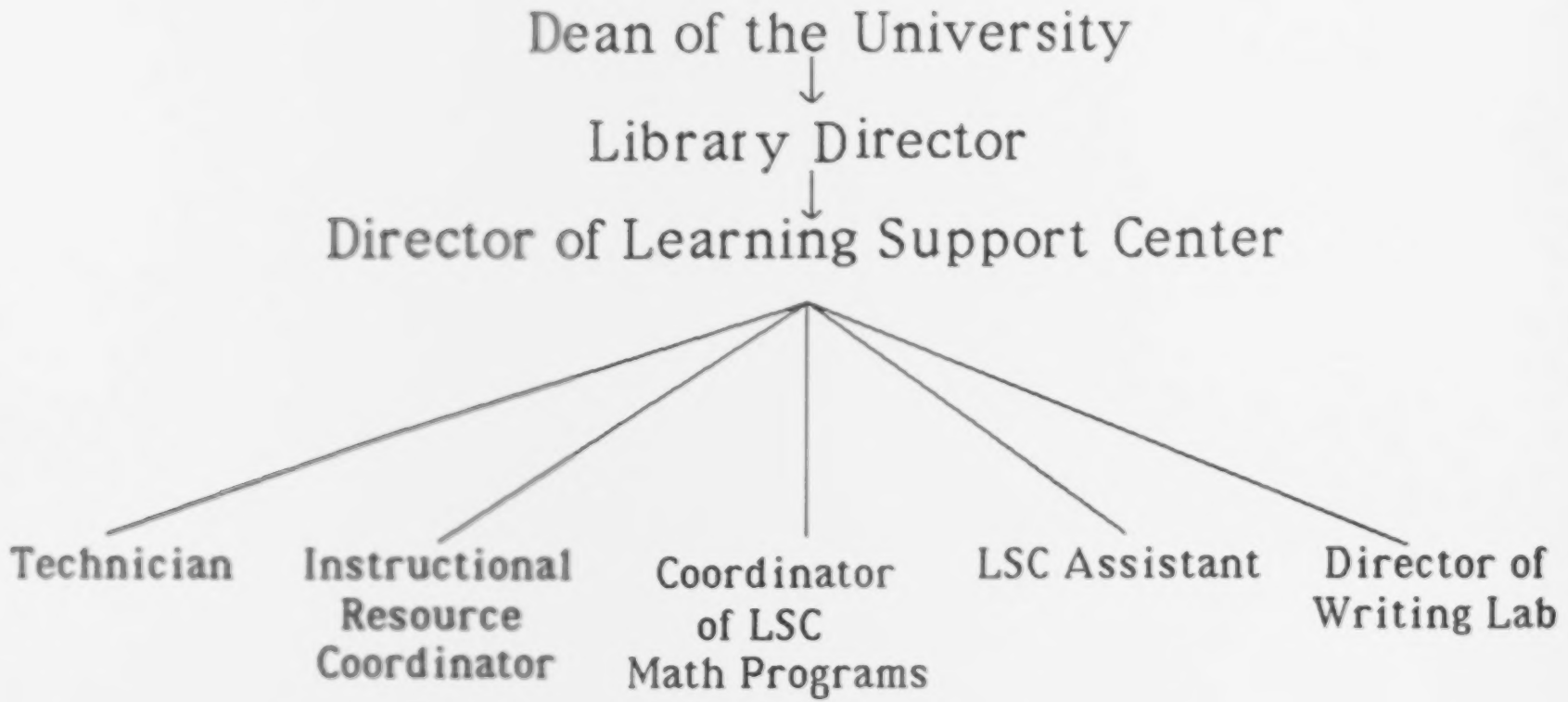

Dean of the University
Library Director
Director of Learning Support Center
Technician
Instructional Resource Coordinator
Coordinator of LSC Math Programs
LSC Assistant
Director of Writing Lab

Figure 4

Learning Support Center Services
Zondervan Library

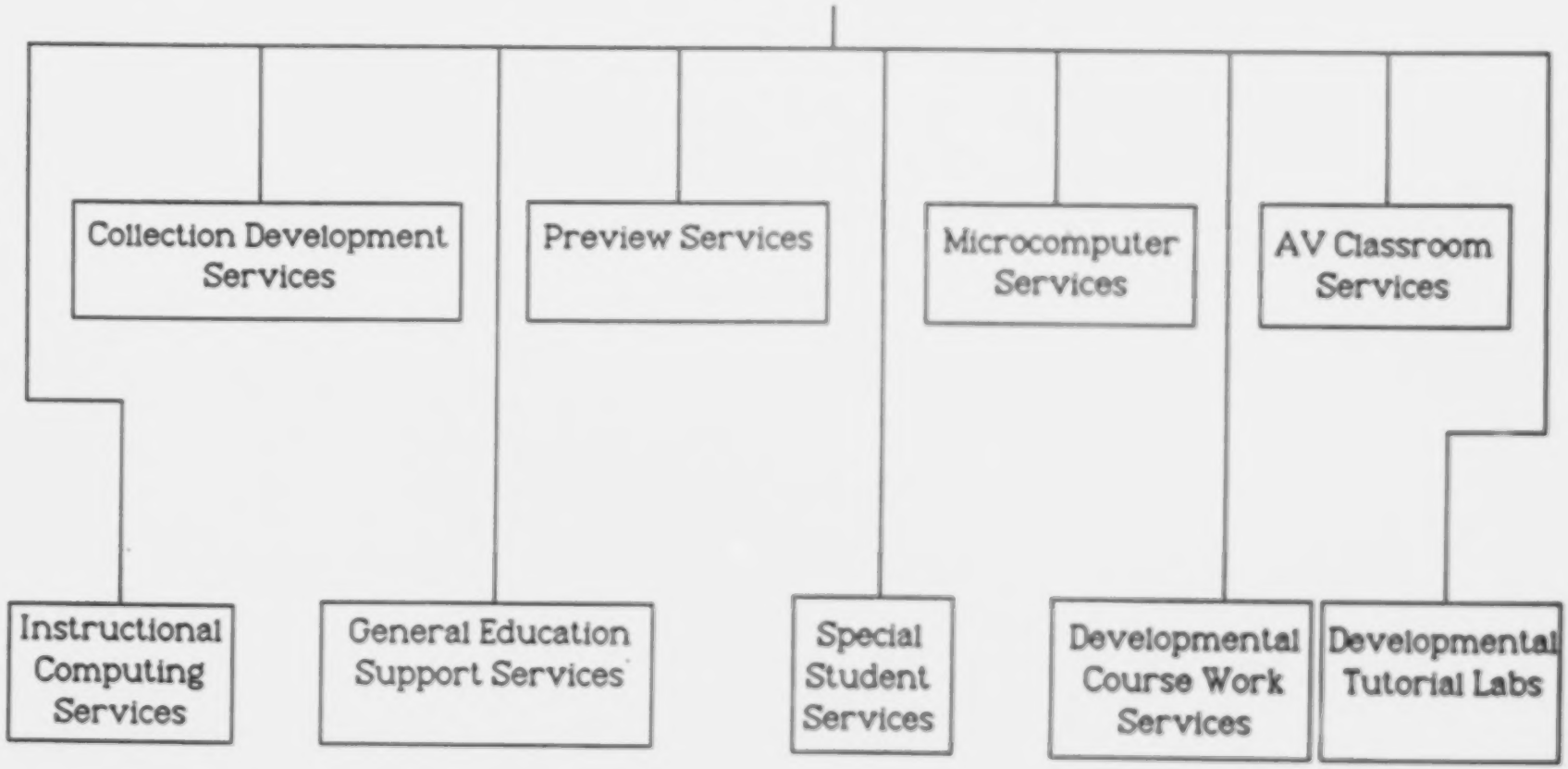


Figure 5

COMMITTEES ASSOCIATED WITH LEARNING SUPPORT CENTER

There are two committees that have input concerning the policies and operation of the Learning Support Center. They are as listed below.

Instructional Resources Committee

a. Organization

(1) Chairperson, selected annually by the committee from its elected faculty members

(2) Associate vice president for academic affairs

(3) Directors of the information systems, learning resources center, learning support center, library, and educational television

(4) Director of research

(5) Four faculty members from different divisions elected by the faculty for three-year terms, one the first year, one the second year, and two the third year

(6) Three students

b. Duties

(1) To participate when appropriate in the formulation of policy regarding services rendered by the information systems, learning resources center, learning skills center, library, and educational television

(2) To make recommendations to the vice president for academic affairs and to the faculty regarding improvement, extension, and development of the services and facilities of these resource areas

(3) To assist the resource areas with budgetary matters when appropriate

Skills Proficiency Committee

a. Organization

(1) Chairperson, elected from among the committee members

(2) Director of general education

(3) Director of the learning support center

(4) Director of writing

(5) Director of testing

(6) Three faculty members, one each from the departments of mathematics, communication arts, and information sciences elected by faculty in those areas for three-year terms, the terms to be staggered so that no more than one of these offices will become vacant each year

(7) One faculty member-at-large elected by the faculty for a three-year term

b. Duties

(1) To work with the departments of communication arts, English, information sciences, mathematics, and the Testing Office to identify entering freshmen and transfer students who need remedial work

(2) To determine remedies for those students whose deficiencies continue beyond the freshmen level writing courses

(3) To assist the director of general education in decisions about acceptance, evaluation, and effectiveness of WR (writing component) and SP (speech component) courses

(4) To respond to the greater concerns of basic skills proficiency that confront the university through the presence of students with special needs at Taylor University

(5) To assist the director of learning support center in identifying students in the other skills not required for graduation but necessary for success in college: reading, learning, and listening.

ABSTRACT

The Three Rs in a Learning Support Center

This paper discusses the unique Learning Support Center (LSC) program at Taylor University, a private liberal arts college of 1,500 students in Upland, IN. In this LSC, reading, writing, and mathematics professionals add three nontraditional Rs--resources, retention, and renewal philosophies-- to the traditional three Rs in order to reach students.